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Indian Timbers.

The Hill Forests of Western India.

BY

HERBERT MILLS BIRDWOOD, C.S.I., L.L.D., M.A.

Illustrated by eleven Page Plates in Colours.

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appreciable damage done in a particular locality during a short period. Such a consideration alone might partly explain the tendency to reject as idle the fears of experts, and to resent measures savouring of harshness and productive of discontent. In course of time, as forest management became stiffened and matured, friction was undoubtedly developed, and gave rise to difficulties. One of the purposes of the Forest Act of 1890 was to give effect to recommendations for reconciling legitimate local demands with State requirements which were made by the Bombay Government on a consideration of the Report of a Forest Commission appointed with the object, as publicly declared by Lord Reay, of substituting "co-operation for antagonism, confidence for distrust, contentment for disturbance." The Bombay Government has recognised the principle that the central authority in forest matters, so far as the interests of the people are concerned, shall be the Commissioner of the Civil Administrative Division, and that the Forest Department cannot be regarded as the rival of the Revenue Department in respect of such matters. You will not expect me to give any details in illustration of the practical working of this principle. The result has been to bring the Forest Administration into closer union with the general Civil Administration of the country, to remove many causes of complaint, and to place forest work altogether on a sounder footing.

The particular area of which I spoke at the beginning of this paper is within easy reach of the City of Bombay. It includes hilly tracts of country on either side of the range of the Western Ghâts, in the Dekhan and Konkan respectively, between the latitudes, roughly speaking, of Bombay and Satara. As compared with other forest areas elsewhere in the Presidency, it is by no means remarkable, so far as the production of valuable timber is concerned; but it is of interest as illustrating generally the methods of the Forest Department; and it is of special interest to the inhabitants of Bombay and many other cities in the plains, as it includes the two popular hill stations of Matheran and Mahableshwar, which owe much of their value as health resorts to their pleasant woods and abounding undergrowth of beautiful shrubs and flowering plants and ferns, which everywhere keep the ground cool and the air sweet and fresh. Both in climate and splendour of wild woodland scenery they furnish an instructive contrast with those hills of the same tract which have suffered from the destruction of forests in the manner I have already described. An account of the forest flora of Matheran and Mahableshwar will apply generally to similarly preserved portions of the Western Ghâts and the adjoining regions; and, in the time that is left us, it will be sufficient, perhaps, if I deal only with the flora of these two hills. Their vegetation is not indeed identical. Dr. Theodore Cooke, formerly principal of the College of Science at Poona and an accomplished botanist, who always found his "pleasure in the pathless woods" whenever he could escape from college lectures, has estimated that, exclusive of grasses, about 140 flowering plants are found at Matheran which have not been seen at Mahableshwar, and 130 at Mahableshwar which have not been seen at Matheran. Some of the conditions which regulate the distribution of plants are not indeed equally operative at both places. Mahableshwar is about seventy miles nearer the equator than Matheran. The latter is an isolated hill rising from the plain of the Konkan, midway between the Ghâts and the sea; whereas Mahableshwar is further from the sea, and is, to all intents, a part of the range of Ghâts. The highest point of Matheran is about 2,500 feet above the sea-level, whereas the Mahableshwar plateau is at a general elevation of 4,500 feet above the sea, and rises at one point to 4,700 feet. These differing conditions are not without their effect. Some plants are found at Mahableshwar which will not thrive on the lower mountain top. Some Matheran plants, on the other hand, find the higher levels of Mahableshwar beyond their range. I will give a few instances. The most casual observer is struck by the wonderful undergrowth of brake-fern at Mahableshwar, and of the arrow-root plant—which in October and November blooms on almost every square yard of the jungle—and by the beautiful profusion of the *Osmunda* fern, mixed with clustering roses and willows, along the upper stream of the Yenna river. At Matheran the brake-fern is scarcely known. In a few years it will be extinct, if it is not already so; for being rare it has been the prey of thoughtless fern-hunters and cannot defy their onslaughts. It would be impossible for any number of fern-hunters to destroy it at Mahableshwar, and so it is left alone. Even if unmolested at Matheran it drags on at best but a feeble existence. The site is too low for it, the lowest limit of its range in the latitude of Bombay being apparently a little more than 2,000 feet above the sea-level. The Osmunda, again, is not known at Matheran, nor is the Willow (*Salix tetrasperma*), nor the Arrow-root (*Hitchenia caulina*), though other allied plants of the order *Scitamineæ* are plentiful enough. On the other hand, there are some well-known Matheran trees, such as the Kumbha (*Careya arborea*), the Malia or Indian ebony (*Diospyros assimilis*), and the Chandára (*Macaranga Roxburghii*), which do not grow on the Mahableshwar plateau at all. But after full account is taken of all divergences, it is found that many plants are common to the two hills. Such a coincidence is favoured by the practical identity of their geological formation, and by the circumstance that there is no great difference in the range of their mean temperature at different seasons and in their rainfall. Both Mahableshwar and Matheran are huge masses of trap, capped by a thin layer of laterite. Both are within sight of the sea. Both are swept by the same dry winds in the cold weather, and by the same monsoon storms, and both enjoy the full benefit of the monsoon rains. The average mean temperature ranges at Mahableshwar from 63·3° Fahr. to 71·7°, and from 67·8° to 73·5° at Matheran. The average annual rainfall at Mahableshwar amounts to 281·4 inches, and at Matheran to 224·7 inches. Under such

concordant influences it is not surprising that a marked similarity should be apparent in the general outward forms of vegetation on the two hills, due to the frequent presence of the same characteristic plants on both. Everywhere at Mahableshwar, as at Matheran, we find the Myrtle tribe represented by endless woods of the beautiful Jambul tree (*Eugenia Jambulana*), the Melastomas by the Anjan or Ironwood (*Memecylon edule*), the Laurels by the Pisa (*Litsæa Stocksii*), and the Madder tribe by the thorny Gela (*Randia dumetorum*)—a small tree, generally a shrub, with numerous stiff branches, armed with spines, and large fragrant white flowers, which turn yellow before they fade. There is the same undergrowth of shrubs and herbaceous plants, the natural orders of *Leguminosæ*, *Acanthaceæ*, and *Compositæ* being specially and numerously represented. There are many showy climbers, trailers, and creepers, and Orchids and Dendrobiums common to both hills, while everywhere the little silver fern covers with equal impartiality every sheltered bank and rock. Some years ago, before leaving India, I prepared for the "Bombay Natural History Society's Journal," with the aid of several competent botanists, a catalogue of the flora of Matheran and Mahableshwar. I cannot pretend that it is a complete list, for the simple reason that during the four rainy months of the year, when most herbaceous plants are at their best, the hills are practically inaccessible to Europeans; but in addition to the hill flora it includes some of the more conspicuous plants on the higher levels of the road from Poona to Mahableshwar; and the list of forest trees, which are conspicuous at all times, may perhaps be accepted as complete. It may interest you to know that of the 733 names included in the catalogue, about 125 are the names of trees or sub-trees, as distinguished from shrubs, creepers, grasses, ferns, and undergrowth generally. Of the trees probably not more than ten species have been introduced, and about 115 species are probably indigenous. They constitute but a small proportion of the indigenous trees found throughout India, the number of which exceeds 2,000 species, but they give some idea of the diversity of forest vegetation in the limited area under consideration, if we bear in mind that the number of species of indigenous trees in Great Britain is only forty.*

The trees which have been distinctly introduced are the Peach, which is cultivated at the hill station of Panchgani, near Mahableshwar; the Stringy Bark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*), which does not take kindly to Mahableshwar, the rainfall there being evidently too heavy for it, but does better at Panchgani—which, at a distance of only ten miles from Mahableshwar, has a much lower rainfall—though not nearly so well as on the Nilgiri Hills; the *Cinchona succirubra*, which again has not been a success, as on the Nilgiri Hills and elsewhere; the Cassowary tree or Beefwood (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), which has been extensively planted at Panchgani, but much prefers the lower lands nearer the sea, and especially the sandy beaches of the Konkan coast; the Oak (*Quercus robur*), of which, however, there are very few well-grown trees; and the Mulberry (*Morus alba*), which was probably brought from China.

Among the more important or more conspicuous trees which may be regarded as indigenous are two species of Garcinia—the wild Mangosteen (*Garcinia indica*) and the Gamboje tree (*Garcinia ovalifolia*), and two species of Sterculia—the *Sterculia urens*, from the wood of which native guitars are made, and the Goldar (*Sterculia guttata*), conspicuous by its large, peach-shaped fruit, covered with scarlet down; the Silk-cotton tree (*Bombax malabaricum*), which attains a great size, and is a tree of strange beauty when in full bloom, with its large, showy, rose-red flowers; the Kásu (*Elœocarpus oblongus*), with leaves turning red in autumn, and clusters of flowers with white-fringed petals and reddish-brown sepals; the Frankincense tree (*Boswellia serrata*), which is plentiful on the Ghât road between Poona and Mahableshwar; and another balsamiferous tree, the *Canarium strictum*, yielding a gum, burnt as incense by the hill people at their religious services, and much sought after on account of the rarity of the tree, of which I have found only one specimen at Matheran, to my lasting wonder at its presence there, in a thick wood, far from its congeners, and hemmed in by countless aliens; the *Garuga pinnata* (belonging also to the same natural order *Burseraceæ*), the bark of which is used in tanning; the Indian Satin-wood (*Chloroxylon Swietenii*), an excellent wood for cabinet work of the better kind; the Indian Red-wood or Bastard Cedar (*Soymida febrifuga*), the bitter bark of which is used as a substitute for cinchona bark; two species of the Jujube tree (*Zizyphus*); the Koshimb tree (*Schleichera trijuga*), on the young branches of which lac is produced in many parts of India; the well-known Mango tree (*Mangifera indica*), which is found wild on many hills, though sometimes said to have been introduced by the Portuguese monks from Brazil; the "Flame of the Forest" (*Butea frondosa*), which has given its name—"Palas" in the vernacular—to the memorable plain of Palási, commonly known as Plassey; the Blackwood tree (*Dalbergia latifolia*), of which is made the elaborately-carved furniture, which at one time was much prized in Bombay; the beautiful Indian laburnum (*Cassia fistula*); the *Acacia Suma*, from the wood of which Catechu is manufactured; and yet another beautiful representative of the order *Leguminosæ*, the Laeli (*Albizzia stipulata*), a very conspicuous tree at Matheran, with clean stem and spreading branches, finely pinnate leaves, and large acacia-like flowers, with numerous white, lilac-tipped stamens; the Ain (*Terminalia tomentosa*), a valuable timber tree; the Myrobolam tree (*Terminalia Chebula*), which is found in great abundance on Mahableshwar, the fruit—the Chebulic Myrobolam of commerce—being largely exported, coming indeed, for the whole

* Lieut.-Col. Bailey on "Forestry in India," *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* for 1897, p. 572.

51.—*Chloroxylon Swietenia, D.C.* Satinwood or Hurugalu. A moderate-sized deciduous tree, found in Central and South India, also in Ceylon. Wood very hard, yellowish-brown, (the inner wood of a darker colour), with a beautiful satiny lustre. It is used for agricultural inplements, cart building, furniture, picture frames, turning, and cabinet making; and is found to stand well under water. Weight, about 62 lbs. per cubic ft.

52.—*Schima Wallichii.* Makusal-Chilauni. A large evergreen tree. Wood red, or reddish-brown, moderately hard. Weight 44 lbs. per cub. ft. Used chiefly for building, also for canoes and ploughshares. GAMBLE.

53.—*Lagerstrœmia tomentosa.* Laieya.

A large deciduous tree. Wood moderately hard. Used for bows, spear-handles, canoes and cart-wheels. GAMBLE.

54.—*Lagerstrœmia Flos-Reginæ.* Arjuna or Jarul. Large deciduous tree. Wood hard. Used for ships, boats, building, carts; in Ceylon for casks. Main timber of E. Bengal, Chittagong, Burma, but becoming scarce. GAMBLE.

55.—*Lagerstrœmia lanceolata.* . Boda or Bentaek.

56.—*Lagerstrœmia lanceolata.* Nandi A very large deciduous tree, common in the forests of Kadur and Shimoga Districts. Wood red or reddish brown and moderately hard. It is a valuable timber tree, and grows to a very large size. It is used for building purposes, carts, coffee cases and furniture. Weight about 42 lbs. per cubic foot. [Mysore Catalogue.]

57.—*Lagerstrœmia lanceolata.*

58.—*Lagerstrœmia hypoleuca.* Pymmah. A large deciduous tree. Wood red, hard, used for shingles, posts, floors, spokes and felloes of cart wheels. Durable and seldom attacked by white ants. GAMBLE.

59.—*Albizzia procera.* Safed Siris.

A large deciduous tree. Wood hard. Good for fuel. Used for sugar-cane crushers, rice pounders, wheels, agricultural impl

60.—*Albizzia Lebbek.* A large deciduous tree. Wood hard. Used for sugar-cane crushers, oil-mills, furniture, well curbs and wheels; in S. India for boats. It is probably the "East Indian Walnut" of the European market. GAMBLE.

61.—*Albizzia Lebbek.*

62.—*Pterocarpus Marsupium, Roxb.* (Honnê.) A large deciduous tree, common in Mysore and Shimoga forests. Wood very hard, close grained ; tough and strong, heartwood yellowish brown with darker streaks. This wood is durable, seasons well, and takes a fine polish. It is much used for door and window frames, posts and beams, cart and boat building. From wounds in the bark it yields a red gum resin called "Kino," much used in medicine. The average weight is about 48 lbs. per cubic foot. [Mysore Catalogue.]

63.—*Pterocarpus Marsupium.*

64.—*Cedrela Toona.* Indian Mahogany-Toon. Deciduous. Wood soft, does not split or warp. Wt. 35 lbs. per cub. ft. Durable, not eaten by white ants. Used for furniture, door-panels, carving, tea & cigar-boxes. GAMBLE.

65.—*Pterocarpus dalbergioides.* Padauk. Principal timber tree of Andaman islands. Very large tree. Wood moderately hard. Weight 48 lbs. per cub. ft. Used in Europe and America for pianos, furniture, parquet floors,

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